

become profitable. Something needs to be done to level the field for producers.

Developing value-added agricultural industries will bring increased economic development along with the spirit of hope to Montana and other rural States. And that is good for our pocketbooks, it is good for our communities, and it is good for our quality of life.

□ 1630

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. HART). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BONIOR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BONIOR addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HAYES addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. POMEROY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. EMERSON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SOLVING PROBLEMS OF RURAL AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Madam Speaker, in 1908, President Roosevelt charged the Country Life Commission with the task of solving the rural problem. He identified this problem as the fact that the social and economic institutions of this country are not keeping pace with the Nation as a whole almost 100 years ago, and that would just as easily describe our situation in America today.

Many people are aware that there is a farm crisis plaguing rural America. However, fewer people are aware that this crisis does not stop at the farm but extends to the whole of rural America. Crumbling infrastructure, lack of educational and employment opportunities, outmigration of youth, inadequate health care facilities, and a growing digital divide are just a few of the struggles that our rural communities must overcome. We must take steps to close that gap and to recognize

the vital contributions of rural communities to American economic, cultural, and civic life.

Just over a year ago, I joined with my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Missouri (Mrs. EMERSON), in resurrecting the Congressional Rural Caucus. The Rural Caucus is grounded in the belief that the needs of rural America are diverse and unique. We stand united in the belief that it is past time for Congress to stand up for rural America. We must do all we can to ensure that our rural communities are not just to survive, but they may thrive as well. Only when we tailor policies which address the unique needs of rural America will we see that day.

The 107th Congress will provide numerous opportunities to speak up for rural America, but I would like to mention two in particular.

The first is the upcoming farm bill. This Congress will be updating our farm policy for the first time since 1996. We must seize this opportunity not just to rethink our commodity policies, but to pause and to reflect upon the needs of all rural citizens. An important component of the farm bill certainly is our commodity policy, but the needs of rural America go far beyond commodities. The question that we must ask with the farm bill is not how do we fix our commodity programs, although this is clearly an important question and requires our attention. Rather, we must ask ourselves: What is our social contract with rural America; and what actions do we need to take to reinforce that contract?

Our obligation and debt to our rural communities is greater than ever. We must fulfill that debt by pledging to work harder than ever to assist rural America.

I am not alone in this belief. On May 23, I joined 120 of my colleagues in sending a letter to the leadership of the House Committee on Agriculture urging them to make rural development an integral part of the upcoming farm bill.

However, the farm bill is just the beginning. The second opportunity lies in strengthening our partnership with the White House. The Rural Caucus is committed to moving forward with the White House as full partners. Together we can make great steps in strengthening our rural communities, but the White House must do their part.

We have programs that assist rural America, but they are scattered throughout departments and agencies with little coordination between them. We must recognize that decades of incremental and piecemeal efforts have resulted in policy which no longer address the realities of life in these rural communities.

Before stepping forward with a comprehensive new blueprint for rural America, we must step back to survey the landscape of rural America and our patchwork set of policies that are directed towards it. It is time to follow

the lead of other industrialized countries in the world in crafting an integrated and comprehensive rural policy. They have done it. We can do it as well.

The time has come to address the entire rich fabric of our farming and rural communities across the country and not just the single threads that bind it together. At stake is not just the continued existence of our rural communities. At stake is the very soul of this great country. If rural America dwindles away, all of America is deprived of a great asset. If rural communities turn to ghost towns, the spectre will haunt us all.

Madam Speaker, I urge Congress to support our rural communities.

APPROPRIATORS SHOULD FULLY FUND FIRE AND EMS DEPARTMENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, the numbers are in, and the results are overwhelming. This Congress for the first time in the history of America last year authorized and appropriated \$100 million for the American fire and emergency services community to meet their local needs. It was an historic action.

Within a 30-day time period, from April 1 until May 2, the 32,000 fire and EMS departments across this country had the opportunity of applying for matching funds to meet their local needs and to meet the national responsibilities being placed on them in our effort to prepare for an incident involving a weapon of mass destruction.

Within that 30-day time period, there were 30,000 requests for funds from over 20,000 departments, from the smallest rural department in rural America, to the largest department in our largest city. They requested funds for breathing apparatus, for training, for new technology, for communication systems, for fire apparatus. The resultant 20,000 requests totaling 30,000 specific applications asked for \$3 billion of assistance. We only appropriated \$100 million.

Madam Speaker, there will be a lot of very unhappy and disappointed fire and emergency services departments. But we have made an historic beginning, and I would encourage our colleagues to join together and request that we increase the funding for that grant program to \$300 million in this year's appropriation process so that we can continue to meet the need of our domestic defenders.

Some would say this is too much money. Madam Speaker, local law enforcement officials across this country receive \$4 billion a year from the Federal Government. While I support our local law enforcement, our fire and EMS personnel should certainly receive no less. \$100 million is a long way from \$4 billion.